

Modernising our approach to the 2028 Census

Stats **NZ**
Tatauranga Aotearoa

Discussion document for public consultation





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CE's foreword

Tēnā koutou katoa,

The practice of conducting censuses has been in existence for thousands of years. From around 2,500 BC the Egyptians used censuses to work out the scale of the labour force they would need to build their pyramids. The Romans conducted censuses every five years, calling upon every man and his family to return to his place of birth to be counted.

We in Aotearoa New Zealand, and in other countries across the world, have undertaken the Census to gain insights about people and communities for many generations. Our first official population count was in 1851, and the national census has evolved from there. Over the years it's been adapted to reflect our society and capture the needs of New Zealanders and issues of the day.

Over the years, we have also redeveloped and refined how information is collected, processed, and then published. These changes are always designed to produce better-quality data and information about and for New Zealand – ultimately, our job at Stats NZ is to produce good, timely data and statistics for you, the people of New Zealand.

We take our role as the country's official data stewards very seriously, acknowledging the value of data and the important role it plays in our society. Official data underpins decision-making at a local and national level. Communities, businesses, iwi, Government, and individuals throughout our country rely on quality data and statistics to make informed decisions every day.

With our society rapidly evolving – our needs, aspirations, and attitudes changing as a country – at Stats NZ we need to keep pace. **People want more and new data, and they want it faster. We must therefore ensure that the way we collect and produce high-quality, timely data evolves.**

Responding to this demand has been a focus for Stats NZ for some time. Hand-in-hand with that is our understanding of the burden that conducting what has been a 'full enumeration census' – such as our recent 2023 Census – places on the public, both financially and in terms of the time commitment required for households.

There is also duplication that needs to be removed for people. We often hear that, "you already know this about me", as Kiwis acknowledge that information about them is already held in official records.

This all adds up to a need for us to reimagine and modernise the census as we have come to know it.



This is where you hold the power to have your say, and I would like to invite you to tell us what you think can be done better.

This public consultation document contains everything you need to know about our broad approach to the changes and improvements we are exploring.

Highlights of these improvement include making greater use of admin data – that’s data already collected by other agencies and organisations as part of their everyday operations. For several years, Stats NZ has shown that we can use data that government already collects to not only produce official statistics but to do so more efficiently, more frequently, and more sustainably, while protecting the privacy New Zealanders rightly value.

Using more admin data also opens the door over time to producing new measures and insights as our needs as a society evolve, such as wellbeing and living standard indicators.

How we survey in general is also in focus. Although Stats NZ will make far greater use of admin data, surveys will continue to play a role – but will take a different form. We are exploring how surveys can be modernised, be community-led and be more targeted to meet the data needs and aspirations of particular population groups and social cohorts.

This is where your thoughts and feedback will very much help us in getting things right. As the national statistics office, it is important that we provide value to you, while continuing to uphold high standards of data protection, privacy, and ethics.

We want you, and others who call our country home, to understand and be comfortable with the changes that are on the table. This is your chance to have your say on our future, and I truly value your input.

Mark Sowden

Government Statistician and Chief Executive - Tumu Whakarae
Stats NZ - Tatauranga Aotearoa

Finding your way around this document

Purpose and structure of this document

This document outlines our proposal for modernising our approach to the New Zealand census.

It is divided into four parts:

- **Introduction** [pg 5]
Sets out the strategic context and key drivers for change
- **About the census** [pg 8]
Provides background information on the census, how it is conducted, and its value
- **Adopting an admin first approach** [pg 19]
Outlines our plan to deliver the 2028 Census by reusing existing data where possible (supported by surveying and other tailored options), and canvasses some survey models being considered
- **Working with you** [pg 28]
Explains our next steps, including how we will incorporate your feedback and work with New Zealanders on the detailed design of the 2028 Census

Consultation questions and feedback

We invite you to make a formal submission on the proposals. Consultation questions are included in the text at the end of each section.

Submissions must be lodged by 18 June 2024.

Please make your submissions online at www.stats.govt.nz/future-census. You can also make a phone submission by calling 0508 525 525.

For more information

Visit www.stats.govt.nz/future-census or ask the census team at 2028census@stats.govt.nz and 0508 525 525.

If you are Deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired, the NZ Relay Service can help you make contact by phone. Go to www.nzrelay.co.nz to find out more about this free service.



Introduction

Our world, and people's information needs, are changing

Data has the power to change lives. It tells our story – how we live, take care of each other, improve government services, and shape our environment. Data also helps to grow our economy – supporting the design and development of new products, services, and business models, and the creation of new industries.

Stats NZ is New Zealand's official data and statistics agency. We deliver high-quality, impartial, and objective official statistics about our country and the lives of its people. Our work supports communities, individuals, iwi, and businesses to make informed decisions about our future, while also identifying key trends and developments.

The needs and attitudes of New Zealanders continue to change and evolve. There is a growing demand for data and statistics that are more timely, comprehensive, and detailed. At the same time, like many other countries, we face challenges with our traditional data collection methods. We are only able to produce high-quality data from surveys if enough people fill them out. But it is getting harder to reach the right number of people that represent society through surveying.

The COVID-19 pandemic and events like Cyclone Gabrielle have underscored the critical role of data in both responding to and recovering from crises. These events have highlighted risks around the sustainability of our data system and our ability to produce high-quality statistics. It is increasingly important to be able to access relevant data quickly so that we can respond at speed. We need new data provided in different ways to respond to today's challenges, such as climate change, infrastructure demands, and natural disasters, and so that we can better plan for the future.

Many communities, iwi, Māori organisations, and non-government organisations are increasingly taking the lead in providing services like education, health, social support, housing, and crisis response. However, these communities are not always empowered with the right data to deliver in these areas. To unlock the value of data and enable communities to pursue their own goals, we need a data system that works for and with them.

To provide data and statistics that match what New Zealanders expect as their needs change, Stats NZ must also change and adapt.

We are transforming the way we produce data and statistics

Guided by our strategy – About Aotearoa, for Aotearoa – we are on a journey to modernise and re-imagine how we sustainably deliver quality data and statistics.

Technological advances mean we have growing amounts of data available from a range of different sources and an increasing ability to link data together. This enables us to make better use of the information that individuals, communities, iwi and Māori, and businesses have already shared with government and other organisations. It also means we can transform the way we traditionally collect data about people. When using this data, Stats NZ is committed to taking careful steps to keep it safe, such as using data that does not identify you. This commitment is underpinned by the requirements set out in the Privacy Act 2020 and the Data and Statistics Act 2022.

Reusing data can also lead to better public services. It will support the digitisation of government services by enabling us to integrate data from various government agencies. This in turn can lead to new offerings for New Zealanders, such as being able to access government services through online platforms and apps, and being able to easily see and change the data agencies hold.

You'll see our transformation first through census

By taking advantage of existing data sources and building relationships to better understand the needs of our customers, we aim to deliver a census that looks different but delivers greater value. Our plan for the 2028 Census is to reuse existing data where possible and support this with surveying and other tailored options where existing data is unavailable or of insufficient quality. This document talks about how we might do this.

This approach is an evolution of how census has historically been conducted. It builds on the changes we have made to census over successive years and incorporates insights and feedback from our engagement with partners, communities, and stakeholders on the census. It is important that we get this right.

We want to know what you think

We want to hear from you on our proposed approach. The public submission process from **8 May to 18 June 2024** is intended to formally capture your views.

Your submission will inform the approach we take and support the design of the 2028 Census. You will then have the opportunity to provide further feedback on the new model in early 2025.

This is the start of the conversation. We invite you to be part of the journey.





About the census

The census is the only survey that involves everyone in the country

The census (officially called the Census of Population and Dwellings) provides an official count of people and dwellings in New Zealand. It gives a snapshot of life, people, and communities, and helps to tell the story of social and economic change.

Under the Data and Statistics Act 2022, Stats NZ must do a census every five years. In addition to providing statistics to New Zealand, the census also supports us to meet international expectations. The first official census was run in 1851, and since 1877 there has been a census every five years, with only four exceptions. Over time, the set of questions asked in census has expanded.

Data from the census is highly valuable to New Zealand

The census contains some of the highest quality information we hold as a nation. It includes how our households and families are structured, how people live, changes to our cultural diversity, the qualifications we have, and how we travel to work and school. Knowing these things helps us understand how New Zealanders are doing in many aspects of life and informs how billions of dollars are spent across the country and in our communities.

Did you know?

There are some key pieces of information from the census that provide the greatest value. For instance, information about the total number of people in New Zealand and the age profile of the population is critical for planning important infrastructure and services such as hospitals, schools, and roads.

Census information is used to develop and implement new policies, undertake research, and inform service delivery. Some examples of how census information is used are set out below.

Table A. Examples of how census information is used

<p>Health and wellbeing</p>	<p>Census information is used by government to plan health services such as hospitals, and by health and social service providers to figure out what services are needed in specific areas.</p>
<p>Community services</p>	<p>Councils use census data to decide where to put community services, such as libraries and parks.</p> <p>Community groups and organisations use census information to support funding applications and advocate for improvements within their communities.</p> <p>Local clubs use census population counts to understand whether there are enough people to form sports teams.</p>
<p>Transport, internet, and other infrastructure</p>	<p>Government and councils use census data to understand where public transport, roads, power, internet, water, and sewerage services are needed and how many people will be using them.</p>
<p>Housing</p>	<p>Councils and government use census data to understand whether homes in New Zealand are big enough for our families, where we need to build new housing, and what condition people's homes are in.</p>
<p>Iwi</p>	<p>Iwi use census data to understand more about their people, where they are living, and how they are doing. This helps to plan for future generations, and may influence funding, services, or other initiatives.</p>
<p>Businesses</p>	<p>Businesses use census data to make investment decisions and figure out how they can meet demand for their products and services.</p>
<p>Research</p>	<p>Researchers use census data to understand things like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how mouldy and damp housing affects communities • how many people do not have good access to clean water, schools, or hospitals • how ethnic communities are growing and changing over time and what services they use and need.



Case study:

Using census data to connect rangatahi to job opportunities

Data helps connect young people (rangatahi) to work – helping them and their whole community. James Parker from Hāwera Welding Contractors uses census information to find where rangatahi need employment and how many need employment. He then offers them apprenticeships at his company, Hāwera Welding Contractors, to grow his team. This apprenticeship gives them a new trade, a new direction in life, and financial stability for them and their whānau.

“The positive differences I’ve seen in my guys is that some of them have bought houses, they’ve turned up to work and they know the value of earning the money so they can pay for stuff. That’s a big difference in someone’s life.”

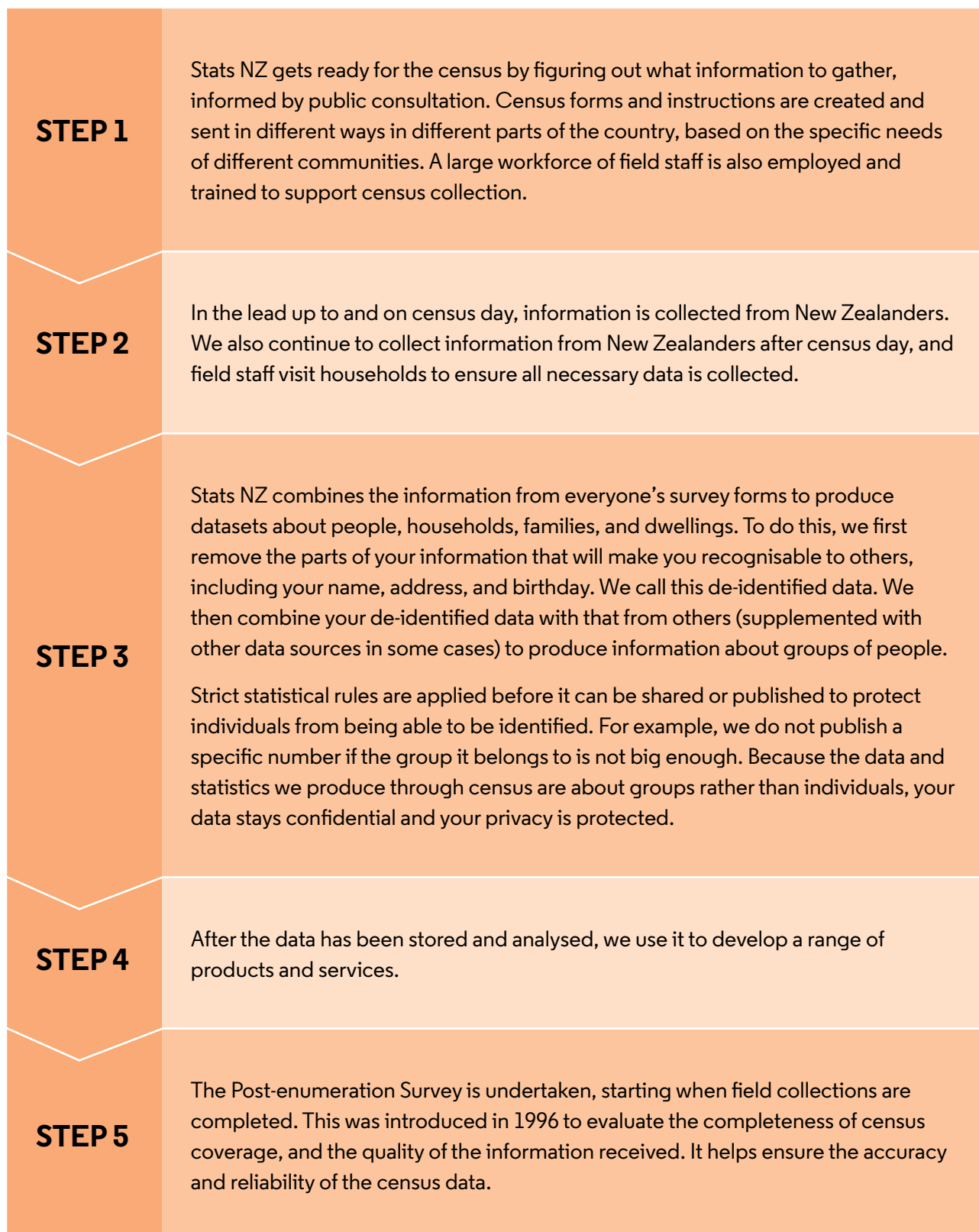
– James Parker, Managing Director



In the past, we have mostly relied on surveying to collect census data

Census has historically been conducted using a full field enumeration model. This means everyone in the country is counted on the night of census, whether they live in New Zealand permanently or not. Each dwelling that is occupied on the night of census must complete a dwelling form, and each person must complete an individual form, or have one completed on their behalf (for example, adults fill out census forms for young children or babies).

Stats NZ goes through a five-step process for each census.



We also conduct follow-up surveys (sometimes referred to as post-censal surveys), building on information collected through census. Two of these surveys include Te Kupenga and the Household Disability Survey. Te Kupenga is Stats NZ's survey of Māori wellbeing, which surveys almost 8,500 people (aged 15 years and over) of Māori ethnicity and/or descent. It gives an overall picture of the social, cultural, and economic wellbeing of Māori people in New Zealand. The Household Disability Survey is the main way we collect information about the experiences and needs of disabled people across New Zealand. It helps us understand more about the wellbeing of disabled people, and barriers experienced in different areas of life. These surveys are on a 10-yearly alternating cycle and have been since they were both conducted in 2013, with Te Kupenga in 2018 and the Household Disability Survey in 2023.



Spotlight on the 2023 Census

We were committed to making the 2023 Census accessible for all New Zealanders. While many parts of the 2023 Census were the same as in earlier censuses, we did some things in new ways to make it easier for people to take part and to ensure more people will be represented in census data. We used the 2023 Census as an opportunity to make stronger connections with partners and communities. Around New Zealand, our census teams worked in and with communities:

- sharing what the census is, and what it does for their community and its people
- learning what people in the community need from the census
- supporting people to do the census
- building support for the use of census data.

We offered people more choice between doing the census online or doing it on paper. We provided census instructions and information in more languages and formats. In addition to English and te reo Māori, we made census instructions and information available on our census website in 27 different languages, and a range of alternate formats – including New Zealand Sign Language, audio, Large Print, Easy Read, and Braille-ready files. We included a geo-spatial map to capture iwi affiliation.

We also worked to increase and support Māori and Pacific peoples' participation in the census. We worked closely with the Iwi Chairs Forum's Data Iwi Leaders Group. We also set up Te Taumata Whakaritenga, a Māori representative forum aimed at increasing the accountability of Stats NZ to iwi and Māori on census. This forum included representatives from the Māori Women's Welfare League, Tūhono Trust, and New Zealand Māori Council, who provided guidance on our implementation plans. We prioritised investment of engagement resources and marketing activities for Māori and Pacific communities and employed more Māori and Pacific staff with connections into their own communities.

We also started Te Mana Whakatipu as a pilot initiative to increase the capability and capacity of iwi. Led by Te Kāhui Raraunga, the operating arm of the Data Iwi Leaders Group, the initiative's primary aim has been to build iwi-led collections and data analytical capability. Collections for the 2023 Census were piloted by iwi collectives in three areas (rohe): Ōhau (Far North), Toitū Tairāwhiti (Gisborne), and Te Whānau ā Apanui (Eastern Bay of Plenty).



3,616 Census collectors providing support. That's more than double the 1,800 collectors for 2018 Census



1,414 Census support events with community organisations



770 locations where people could get assistance to complete their 2023 Census forms

We ensure your information remains private, secure, and confidential

The census, like most data collected by government agencies, must follow the principles outlined in the Privacy Act 2020. This includes ensuring that there is a clear purpose for collecting all data gathered and that individuals have the right to ask for access to their own personal information that agencies or organisations have about them.

In addition to the requirements set out in the Privacy Act 2020, Stats NZ must follow added requirements set out in the Data and Statistics Act 2022 to protect data. Stats NZ staff and researchers working with the data must sign a lifetime statutory declaration of secrecy. We also apply ethical, statistical, and security best-practice standards to the data we collect and work with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner to make sure we follow best practice.

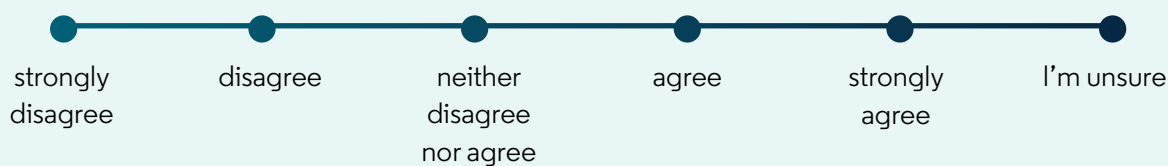
This includes using:

- Five Safes framework, with access restricted to only those who need it, and processes in place to ensure data is managed and transferred in a secure and controlled manner
- Ngā Tikanga Paihere principles to guide safe, responsible, and culturally appropriate use of data.

Consultation question 1



How much do you agree with this statement: 'I trust Stats NZ to keep my information safe.'?



What would you need to see to know that Stats NZ will keep your data safe?

Surveying has been supplemented with admin data in recent years

Not all information Stats NZ uses is collected by us through surveys. Other organisations, including other government departments, and some charities and companies, also collect certain information from you as part of their day-to-day work. This is known as **administrative data** (or admin data) – data that is collected for tasks like providing services (for example, healthcare), meeting legal requirements to register events (for example, registering births or marriages), or keeping records of transactions (for example, tax or benefit payments).

Sometimes this admin data is shared with us to produce data and statistics. Admin data can give us a much better picture of New Zealand, people, dwellings, households, communities, and families without having to always ask every question in surveys like census. This also saves you having to provide certain information again.



Case study:

Using admin data to produce core trade statistics

New Zealand has a long history of using admin data to produce statistics, especially when it comes to trade. For over 100 years, we have relied on information received from the NZ Customs Service about what gets imported and exported to produce our core trade statistics. This data comes from entry documents lodged by exporters, importers, and brokers for all exports and imports. The data is securely transferred to us daily. We process and review the collected data, and aggregate it into monthly outputs. These outputs include our official statistical releases, summary tables, and detailed data available for download on our online data platform Infoshare.

There is a big demand for this data – for example, our Harmonised Trade database is the most accessed area on our data platform Infoshare. We also receive hundreds of requests each year from different customers, including businesses, industry groups, and media outlets, for trade data. Trade data is also used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) as part of trade negotiations, and by other government agencies like the Ministry of Primary Industries to inform policy decisions.

Exports and imports are also key parts of New Zealand's current account balance (measured in the Balance of payments and international investment position release) and gross national product (measured in the quarterly GDP release). As a result, trade data is a vital element of Stats NZ's key economic releases. This underscores the value of trade data, both on its own and as part of broader macroeconomic indicators (that is, statistics or data that reflect the economic circumstances of a particular country, region or sector), for entities like the Reserve Bank of New Zealand (RBNZ), the Treasury, and commercial banks.



Case study:

Using admin data to produce international migration statistics

In 2023, New Zealand saw 11.5 million people crossing its borders. But only a small number of these were migrant arrivals or migrant departures – people changing their country of residence. Accurate measurement of migration is important for many reasons:

- it is a critical input into population estimates and projections, which is the basis for labour market statistics
- it is a key driver of labour and housing market changes
- it helps us evaluate immigration policies.

The traditional way to identify migrants was to ask every traveller to complete arrival and departure cards, which included questions on how long people planned to stay or be away. Those with intended stays/absences of 12 months or more were considered to be migrants, regardless of how long they actually stayed or were absent.

Departure cards were removed in late 2018. Since then, Stats NZ has produced official measures of international migration using border-crossing (passport) data from the NZ Customs Service. Arrivals and departures are linked to precisely identify how long travellers are spending in New Zealand or away overseas.

The arrival card (New Zealand Traveller Declaration) is still in operation, serving multiple administrative and statistical needs. But millions of departure cards a year no longer need to be distributed, completed, and processed. New Zealand's migration statistics are still incredibly prompt by international standards and ultimately more accurate than relying on information collected in departure cards.



Case study:

Using admin data from Inland Revenue to produce statistics about income

Outside of census, Stats NZ also collects information through other individual, household, and business surveys. One example is the Household Economic Survey, which is collected from thousands of households each year. Personal information like housing costs, material wellbeing, disability status, and other information is gathered and combined to publish statistics about groups of people.

This survey is complemented by alternative data sources, including admin data from Inland Revenue on wages and salaries. This is because admin data on wages and salaries tends to be more accurate than what people can recall and reduces the time and effort it takes people to complete a survey.



We now use a combination of survey and admin data

When responses are not given or lack detail in census forms, survey data is merged with alternative data sources (including admin data and data from earlier censuses) to help fill gaps in information. This process is referred to as a **combined model**.

The combined model was introduced in the 2018 Census due to lower-than-expected response rates. For the 2023 Census, we used a combined model by design. The combined model allows us to produce census outputs that are higher coverage and more representative than if we relied only on census responses. By combining census data with other information sources, we expect to deliver data covering around 97 percent of the population through the 2023 Census. Without the use of admin data, we would be unable to produce robust and reliable population estimates.

Table B. Examples of sources of admin data used to supplement the 2023 Census

Data	Source
Gender	Identities (Ministry of Social Development)
Study participation	School enrolments, tertiary enrolments, industry training information (Ministry of Education)
Birthplace	Birth records (Department of Internal Affairs); border movements (NZ Customs Service)
Total personal income	Employer monthly schedule and individual tax returns (Inland Revenue); Benefits information (Ministry of Social Development)
Number of children born	Birth records (Department of Internal Affairs)
Dwelling type	Tenancy bonds (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment)

Our use of the combined model, coupled with the increasing sophistication and availability of admin data sources and methods, now presents an opportunity to reimagine how we deliver a more modern and fit-for-the-future census.

Adopting an admin-data-first approach

We believe admin-data-first is the future of census

We are changing the way we produce our statistics so that they are responsive to the new and changing needs of our data users and stakeholders. We know that people want a wider range of statistics that are delivered faster and offer more detailed insights. To be able to deliver on this, and to ensure the sustainability of our data system going forward, we want to shift to an **admin-data-first** approach (note: admin data is defined on page 14).

Adopting this approach means we will prioritise using admin data sources to provide the data for the census. When admin data is not available or not high quality, we will collect the data using other means, such as surveying. This change would allow us to focus our surveys on gathering information that reflects diverse needs and would ensure that all New Zealanders see themselves reflected in the census data.

Countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, which have census approaches like New Zealand's, are shifting towards incorporating more admin data into their census processes. Some are already using methods that Stats NZ is currently considering. For example, in late 2023, the United Kingdom completed consultation on moving from a 10-yearly census to a model that primarily uses admin data, complemented by survey data and a wider range of data sources.

An admin-data-first approach will deliver significant benefits

Using more admin data gives us the opportunity to expand on the data we collect and the statistics we publish, as we will be able to access a wider range of data without needing to ask all New Zealanders to answer more questions on the census form. By removing questions that we already have from alternative sources, we can collect new information that is meaningful and important to individuals and communities. Greater use of admin data could also mean, in some cases, we wouldn't need to visit New Zealanders in their homes to do surveys as much, and there would be fewer census questions for New Zealanders. This can save people time and effort.

Because admin data is collected continuously, it will enable us to provide important data and statistics to New Zealanders faster and more often. For some areas, admin data has wider reach, is more detailed, and can be used in more ways. This allows us to respond more quickly when new needs emerge because the data is likely to be on hand already. It also reduces our vulnerability to external events (like pandemics, natural disasters, and severe weather events), which delayed earlier censuses.

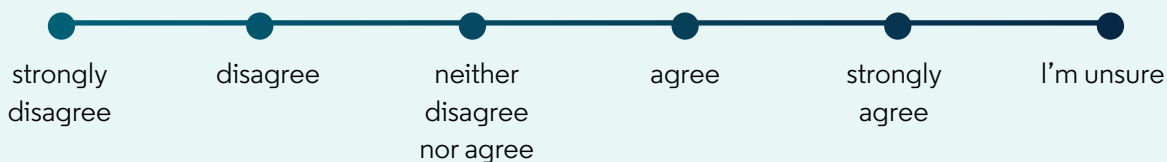
We want to focus on providing valuable data and statistics that help communities thrive, drive innovation, and ensure that we are meeting national and international expectations for prompt, relevant data.



Consultation question 2

How much do you agree with these statements:

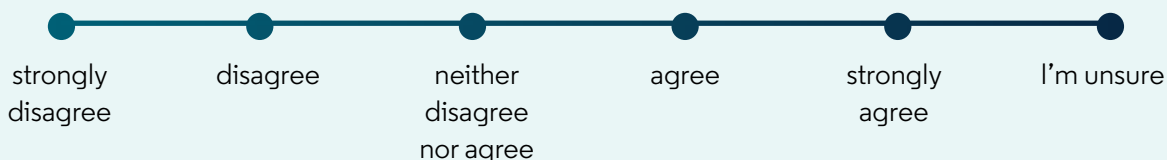
'I am okay with Stats NZ reusing information (like tax or housing information) I have given to other organisations, so that Stats NZ can produce data, statistics, or research that would benefit me and my community.'



If you want to, you can tell us more.

Consultation question 3

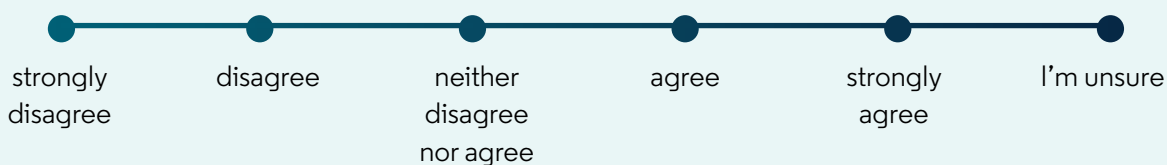
'I would prefer to not answer some questions in the census if Stats NZ can get this information by reusing information I have already shared with other organisations (like my country of birth or the city I live in).'



If you want to, you can tell us more.

Consultation question 4

'I want Stats NZ to ask different questions in the census, not questions other government agencies have already asked me.'



If you want to, you can tell us more.

Some of the data we get from census can be sourced from admin data

Around half of the current data collected in the census about people and dwellings (also referred to as census attributes) can already be delivered through admin data.

In some cases, our admin data provides better coverage than survey data. For instance, we know that the best way to count the population, which is a key part of the census, is best delivered through admin data. In other cases (for approximately half of our current census attributes), our admin data is of similar quality to survey data. For example, we know we have quality admin data about New Zealanders' age, where New Zealanders live, and sex (we use the term 'sex' in this document to refer to admin sources that contain a mixture of sex and gender information, which have high coverage for the population overall). In addition to these core demographic variables, we also have good admin data on birthplace, number of years in New Zealand (for migrants), number of children born, location and mobility, income, work, and education.

For these attributes, we are confident that we can produce quality statistics that meet the needs of New Zealanders, our partners, and our customers using an admin-data-first approach. The measures and insights that can be created primarily from admin data could be published at least annually and could even start before 2028.

But surveying will continue to play an important role

In some cases, no admin data is available, or the available data is not of sufficient quality to produce accurate statistics. For example, we know we do not currently have sufficient admin data about New Zealanders' access to amenities, religious affiliation, language, housing quality, unpaid activities, or gender. Note that increased adoption of our mandated data standard for gender will lead to improved gender data from admin sources over time.

Some attributes are also more subjective (for example, housing quality). To collect this data, we will still need to rely on surveying for the foreseeable future.

We also know that admin data does not always deliver to the information needs of population groups across New Zealand. This includes iwi and Māori, Pacific, rainbow, and disabled communities. This is because admin data is generally collected from the perspective of service delivery without always considering the point of view or context of the individual who the data is about. In addition, if admin data has not been provided directly by individuals, then the quality of the data may be limited. For example, in a health context, sometimes ethnicity fields are filled out by medical practitioners rather than the patients themselves.

While some admin data sources provide very good information about these communities, some population groups are currently mis-represented, under-represented, or not present in admin data sources. This lack of completeness means that admin data cannot fully replace the information collected through surveys.

Diagram: Quality of census attribute data from admin sources

The diagram below shows the sorts of information we currently get from the census survey and how well our admin sources match up. This comparison is based on an ongoing review of census data. It's important to note that this comparison is just a representation (that is, indicative only) because the quality of our admin data sources and methods continues to evolve.





Case study:

Ethnicity data

One area where we know admin data does not meet the needs of communities is ethnicity data. The quality of ethnicity data varies across different data sources. In some data sources, the quality is very high and can support detailed classification of ethnicity that we need from a census. In other data sources, the level of detail collected and the context it is collected in means that the quality is not as high. This means that while ethnicity information for the largest ethnicity groups is high quality, improvements are needed in some data sources to support information for smaller ethnic groups.



Surveying can be done in different ways

We are considering a range of different surveying options to collect some of the information we cannot get through admin data.

For example, one option is to use admin data for as many census attributes as possible but continue to survey the whole population every five years for all remaining census attributes. We could also include a limited set of new topics of value to replace topics delivered by admin data. This option would be most like how census was run in 2023, but people could be asked different (or potentially fewer) questions. Census surveys would continue to be conducted every five years and data would continue to be published at the same frequency (although some products created from only admin data could be produced annually). The scope of questions may be different, and the time and effort it takes people to complete surveys could be reduced.

Another option is to use admin data for as many census attributes as possible and only sample a proportion of the population for remaining census attributes. In this option, the sample would be large enough to guarantee high-quality measures at both national and small-area levels, but not everyone would need to fill out a census survey. Like the first option, surveys would continue to be conducted every five years and data from the surveys would continue to be published at the same frequency, but the time and effort it takes people to complete surveys would be reduced even further as not everyone would fill out a census survey.

An advantage of surveying the whole population is that statistics can be produced for any group or area – no matter how large or small. With a sample survey, the ability to produce detailed information for small populations will depend on the size of the survey and the size of the group. However, even with a very large size the sample survey may not be able to deliver the same detail as when surveying the whole population.

A third option is an annual survey with a smaller sample of the population, with data combined across five years. This would mean that the data and statistics we produce from the surveys would be available more often. In this option, there would be much greater flexibility to add new topics or expand current census topics on a regular or rotating basis. This would mean adding new insights and statistics that deliver greater breadth to some topics (for example, wellbeing or housing quality) or responding to emerging needs (for example, recovery after natural disasters or other events).

What are other countries doing?

Other countries use sample surveys that Stats NZ could consider as part of the 2028 Census model. For example, Canada and the United States supplement a short census survey of the population with a smaller sample survey covering topics such as education and employment. The Canadian sample survey is run five-yearly and covers 25 percent of the population. The United States sample survey is a continuous survey covering 3 percent of the population.

There are many considerations in deciding on the best survey model. For example, different models will affect:

- how soon data and statistics are published after collection (timeliness)
- how often data and statistics are published (frequency)
- how error-free data and statistics are (accuracy)
- how detailed the data and statistics are – for example, whether age can be broken down into single years or age ranges (detail)
- the type and amount of information that is collected (scope)
- how often and how extensively people are surveyed (survey burden)
- how easy it is to access and use data and statistics after they are published (accessibility)
- the cost of running the 2028 Census for taxpayers (cost).

Regardless of the survey model chosen, we will prioritise using admin data and only survey where we need to supplement that information.

We want to know what matters the most to you across these considerations to inform the design and evaluation of potential survey models.

Consultation question 5



What is most important to you about the data and statistics produced through census?

Please choose the things that are most important to you:

- frequency – I want data/statistics from census to be published more often
- timeliness – I want there to be less time between when information is collected and when data/statistics are published
- accuracy – I want data/statistics from census to be as close to error-free as possible, even if it takes longer to collect and publish them
- accessibility – I want data/statistics from census to be easy to find, use, and understand
- scope – I want more information to be collected through census
- detail – I want data/statistics from census to be as detailed as possible, for example breaking an age range down into single years
- survey burden – I want to answer fewer census questions
- cost – I want the cost of running a census to be lower for taxpayers
- something else – please tell us.

Please rank the ones you have selected in order of what is most important to you, with #1 being the most important.

If you want to, you can tell us more.

We will assess different survey models against key criteria

A range of potential survey models will be assessed using key criteria by an evaluation panel, which will include external independent members. The criteria to assess the different models will consider:

- the extent it meets the data needs of customers and stakeholders (such as government agencies, iwi and Māori, key communities, the public, and our international obligations). This will include assessing data quality, timeliness of data, and flexibility to meet changing data needs
- that it delivers for and with iwi and Māori. The 2028 Census must meet Māori data needs, foster Māori capability and capacity to collect, use, and access data, and respect the Crown's responsibility to give effect to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi
- the feasibility of the model (including the timeframe to deliver the model, cost, and design complexity). The model must be achievable and deliver maximum value to New Zealanders at an acceptable cost to New Zealanders
- the impact of the change (on data partners, suppliers and users, the government data system, and Stats NZ's wider transformation), including identifying those most impacted by changing to the new census model
- levels of trust and confidence, such as the extent that the model reflects the views and expectations of the public about the government's use of admin data
- the risk profile of the model, such as assessing the level of delivery risk, reputational risk, and financial risk.

We also want to develop tailored options in some cases

In some cases, neither admin data nor surveys are the best option to collect and deliver the data and statistics that our partners, customers, and communities need.

We want to improve people's access to data and their capability to make use of data and to reduce systemic bias in data. We also acknowledge that there are challenges with using admin data to measure things like personal identity, attitudes, and perceptions. In these cases, we might develop other tailored or partnership options. This could include community-led surveying and the use of new statistical techniques to deliver the data that matters for those communities.

We also want to work with iwi and Māori to design an approach that supports iwi-led design, collection, analysis, and dissemination of iwi and Māori data. This would allow us to collaboratively figure out the best approaches for delivering to iwi and Māori data needs, including iwi affiliation, te reo capability, Māori wellbeing, and more. This approach allows those who are most knowledgeable about the data to manage it from the beginning, resulting in broader coverage and improved data quality.

In addition to improving census through these options, we are also considering ways to improve on our current post-censal surveys like Te Kupenga and the Household Disability Survey.



Consultation question 6

How would these proposed changes affect you and your information needs? (If you are answering about a community or group that might be impacted by the change, please let us know what that community or group is and what the impacts may be.)

Consultation question 7

If Stats NZ, for the census, reuses data about you that you shared with other organisations, what extra things (for example, protections and safeguards) would you like to see? Please choose what matters to you:

- I want to know what my information is being used for
- I want to know when other organisations plan to give my information to Stats NZ (for example through a privacy statement, which tells people how organisations will collect, use, and share their information)
- I want an easy way to tell Stats NZ if things (like my address) have changed
- I'm okay with my information being reused, as long as my data remains de-identified and I cannot be recognised by others in the data
- I'm okay with my information being reused, but only for official statistics and for Stats NZ-approved research
- Anything else – please tell us.

Consultation question 8

Do you have any ideas about how Stats NZ might work with your community to collect data and statistics that cannot be found anywhere else?

Working with you

We know there are still data gaps, and we are working to fill them

We know that our current census does not always deliver to the diverse needs of all groups. Key stakeholders and partners have told us that, in earlier censuses, some people have not been properly equipped to fully take part in the census. Additionally, strategies to increase participation, particularly for Māori and Pacific peoples, have often fallen short.

Going forward, we need to start by first working with our Tiriti partners, communities, businesses, and government to understand what information they need. Once we understand information needs, we can find the best way to source that information. This approach embeds engagement and partnerships as a core part of census and allows for community and iwi and Māori-led solutions in cases where communities are best placed to collect information.

We want to hear from you about your information needs

Over time, we have evolved what we ask in the census to better meet the information needs of our population. For example, we included new questions about gender, variations of sex characteristics, and sexual identity in the 2023 Census to better meet the needs of our rainbow communities.

As noted in an earlier section, in some cases, the census may not always be the best way to collect new information. People might need more detailed information than what the census can provide, and adding questions to the census increases the time and effort required for people to complete it. Additionally, New Zealand's census is already longer than the censuses in many other countries. We need to explore other surveys and methods to appropriately address specific information needs.

That's why we want to hear from you about the sorts of data that would be the most valuable to you. We will then use these insights to work out the best way to source this information – whether that be through admin data, new data sources, or through census or other surveys.

Consultation question 9

What (if any) statistics or information about our society or population would be the most useful to you, your organisation, or your community, and why? Please tell us with as much detail as possible.



Your input will help shape the 2028 Census

We invite you to provide feedback on the proposals. Your feedback on the proposals contained in this document will inform our approach to the 2028 Census and future censuses.

Alongside public consultation, we are also engaging with government agencies, key data suppliers, and a range of other customers to test the quality and availability of the admin data sources that could be used in the 2028 Census. Over the last several months, we hosted a series of meetings to seek feedback on the potential opportunities and challenges of proposed changes. The focus of these meetings to date has centred around collection approaches and options, how products will meet the statistical requirements of data customers, coverage of different population groups, timeliness and quality of data, and how Stats NZ will use linked admin data safely.

This engagement will continue through the public consultation period, and will include:

- the academic and research community, to assess the technical and ethical implications of drawing more heavily on admin data
- priority communities (for example, Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled people, and rainbow communities) who are more likely to be misrepresented, under-represented, or invisible when only admin data sources are used, and where surveying is required to meet information needs
- civil society groups, to discuss any concerns with using admin data sources and any impacts on individual rights and privacy
- a range of other existing customers, including local government and businesses.



Partnering with iwi and Māori

To better serve iwi, hapū, and whānau, we need a data system that aligns with the aspirations that Māori have in relation to the collection, ownership, and application of Māori data. Partnering with Māori ensures that the government data system generates a greater amount of data and better-quality data for and about Māori. Our commitment to partnering with Māori is underpinned by the Data and Statistics Act 2022. In addition to the delivery of programmes by Māori, for Māori, partnering with Māori would allow for more iwi and Māori led services. To make these programmes a success, iwi and Māori need access to quality data to plan effectively and measure impact.

A data system that delivers for iwi and Māori has wider benefits for all New Zealanders, addressing issues like bias and the spread of misinformation. Additionally, it would lift iwi, Māori, and agency data capability and capacity, improving New Zealanders' access to services and their personal data.

As part of our new approach to census, we are engaging with our iwi and Māori partners on how they would like to partner with Stats NZ to meet their data needs and aspirations within the overall approach outlined in this document. This will build on the relationships we already hold with iwi and Māori groups. Our engagement will also be informed by what we have heard from iwi and Māori through our previous engagements on the 2018 and the 2023 Censuses.

In the last few months, we have focussed our engagement with the groups we have formed relationships with. Over the public consultation period and beyond, we will broaden our engagement to other iwi and Māori organisations.



This is the start of our 2028 Census journey – and we invite you to be part of it

Stats NZ will consider all feedback from public consultation and engagement. We will also incorporate the insights and feedback that partners, communities, and stakeholders have already provided to us over the years on census.

In mid-2024, the Government Statistician will decide on the high-level approach and model to be used for the 2028 Census. This decision will be informed by what we have heard through consultation and engagement, further design work, and analysis by an evaluation panel, which will include external independent members.

The Minister of Statistics will then report back to Cabinet to seek endorsement of the Government Statistician’s approach. Once an approach is endorsed, Stats NZ will focus on the detailed design of the new model. This will be undertaken in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders to ensure the new model delivers value, meets agreed information needs, and is safe and trusted.

There will be a second round of public consultation in 2025. This consultation will be more narrowly focussed on the specific content that could be covered in the 2028 Census and options around how Stats NZ could collect particular types of data.

We look forward to hearing from you, both now and in the year to come.



Consultation question 10

Is there anything else you want to say or share with us?



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